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Offshore Safety: Good and Getting Better

In preparation for the 2006 hurricane season, the Minerals Management Service (MMS), the U.S. Coast Guard, the Department of Energy, and the energy industry have been working hard to improve on a good safety record. Following is a summary of advancements that are in place or in development. For the 2006 hurricane season, all moorings for Mobile Offshore Drilling Units (MODUs) are required to be 40 to 50 percent stronger than they were in the Gulf of Mexico during the hurricane season of 2005. That increase in strength is accomplished by:

- Mooring inspection – Closer inspection of type of rope and steel used for mooring will be required.
- Mooring strength – Additional mooring lines will provide more strength.
- Checklist – A detailed checklist must be used to assess all drilling equipment for safety.
- Plan – A hurricane preparedness plan is required.
- Guidelines - Guidelines are being developed that address jack-up rig foundation failures.
- Modifications – Modifications to the 100-year recurrence interval criteria for hurricanes are being considered. Hurricane Katrina was considered a 100-year recurrence interval hurricane.
- Platform design standards – Standards are being assessed and may be revised, including standards for "topside" equipment such as platform rigs, production equipment, and facilities that are not part of the offshore structure.

The process of assessing damage and testing and developing potential technological advancements will never be complete because it is a continuous process. MMS and its partner organizations are dedicated to making certain that offshore energy methods and procedures are safer today than yesterday, and that they continue to improve.

The *"Ocean Confidence"* MODU/semisubmersible deep water drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico.

Improved Communication Among the U.S. Coast Guard, Department of Energy, and MMS

A system of communication with the U.S. Coast Guard and the Department of Energy has been formalized in the months since the 2005 hurricane season. For example, when a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) is activated, MMS and the Coast Guard will be in constant communication. Areas of responsibility are clearly defined, such as that MMS and the Coast Guard will monitor the evacuation of offshore equipment and personnel.

Key personnel from both organizations will maintain close coordination as long as a COOP is in effect. MMS has the lead in contacting offshore operators as well as in providing location of operator information to the Coast Guard. MMS and the energy industry will work closely to decide when operators can return to work. The plan includes many additional details that should serve the offshore energy industry well in the 2006 hurricane season and beyond.

MMS manages offshore oil and gas exploration as well as renewable energy sources including wind, wave, solar, and underwater current on 1.76 billion acres of the Outer Continental Shelf while protecting the human, marine, and coastal environments. MMS also collects, accounts for, and disburses mineral revenues from Federal and American Indian lands.

For more information on MMS and advancements in the offshore energy exploration process, visit www.mms.gov.

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